ON SECRET SERVICE

True Stories of Experiences in the State, War, Treasury and Postoffice Departments.

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THE MARKED STAMPS

Cheney's life moved on apace and his career broadened with time. He was always a student of human nature and paid close attention to business. He was also a student of other things and a very well-read man. Naturally, he was a detective; he had a peculiarly strong intuitive power and a keen sense of deduction. I mean by this, natural deduction. He was not a Sherlock Holmes—could not tell your wife was away because a button was off your waistcoat, or that you had lately moved your dressing glass because your face was more smoothly shaven on one side than on the other. These things he left for the realms of literature and romance. He studied crime as a theologian studied theology and the Holy Writ. First he would find the motive of a criminal act—there was always a motive; then he would find the person that had this motive.

Cheney was esthetic in his taste, a lover of art, literature and music, and always a gentleman. His bachelor apartments in St. Louis were beautifully furnished and became a rendezvous for a coterie of choice spirits. While he saw a great deal of the seamy side of life, that great underworld so close to our very doors and yet always covered, his nature never became hardened. He was ever ready to help, and many a man, and woman, too, for that matter, are walking the streets to-day, free and honored by their fellow beings, because at a crucial point in their career Col. Jack Cheney had turned them up the hill when their footsteps were carrying them down. His fame as a detective spread over the country and many flattering offers were made him to take charge of special work for large corporations, but he was more content to work for the government until the time was ripe for him to branch out for himself. He enjoyed the acquaintance, confidence and hospitality of many persons of prominence from one end of the country to the other. Women he admired, but that is all. His many and varied experiences had taught him that women were not to be trusted with great secrets. A good woman was an angel to be respected, nurtured and cared for; a bad one, the reverse. Dan Cupid had as yet never made him captive, but there was always present with Jack Cheney a mental photograph of a happy home presided over by a woman he could love and who would love and respect him. But that was in the indefinite future, not now.

Cheney never allowed his close contact with crime to contaminate him. When he was on a case he was all detective, a veritable sleuth, every nerve strained to accomplish the desired end; but when the chase was over and the quarry run to earth Cheney forgot it.

He was sitting in his office one morning smoking his usual cigar and allowing his mind to run back to some of the stirring days of the civil war in which he played no small part when a knock interrupted his reverie.

"Come in," he sharply said.

A young man about 30 years old, well dressed and of good appearance, came in and stood before him. He was visibly perturbed and shifted from one foot to the other while he nervously twirled his hat in his hands.

"Are you Col. Cheney, sir?"

"I am."

"Well, sir, my name is Stanton, Fred C. Stanton." Cheney recognized the name as one of a prominent family living in St. Louis.

"Well, Mr. Stanton, what can I do for you, sir? Sit down," replied Cheney, waving his hand towards a chair. "Have a smoke?"

"Thank you, no, Col. Cheney. You see I am in great trouble and Judge Treat, who is an intimate friend of mine, told me you might help me out if you would. He gave me this card to you." Cheney read the card and when he had finished said:

"Any friend of Judge Treat's is a friend of mine and if I can be of service I shall only be too glad to do so. You are in trouble; what is it?"

"Yes, I am in trouble, and serious trouble at that. Last year I married Judge Anderson's daughter and we have a beautiful home out on Laclede avenue. We are very happy. There never has been a cloud to mar our domestic happiness. About two months ago anonymous letters began coming to Mrs. Stanton. Four so far have been received, and similar letters have reached several friends of mine saying they will get to Mrs. Stanton sooner or later. These letters all contain references to me, hint at an unsavory past and a coming revelation which will destroy me socially and otherwise in St. Louis. Mrs. Stanton is not well and in a very nervous state and the receipt of any such letters would, I am afraid, cause serious consquences." Mr. Stanton paused for a moment to regain his composure and then proceeded.

"Fortunately, the first letter came to my hands. It was addressed to Mrs. Stanton. I do not open any of her mail, but the peculiarity of the address of this letter attracted my attention. The address was not in handwriting nor was it printed, but had been composed by words and figures cut out of a newspaper and pasted on the outside of an envelope. The letter inside was similarly made. That day, down-town, six of the same kind of letters were handed me by friends of mine. They had been received at their respective houses. Every letter was alike and contained the threat to hurt me with Mrs. Stanton." Again there was a short pause, and Stanton continued:

"You see, I could have all mail diverted from my house to the office, but that would cause Mrs. Stanton to be suspicious, so I have watched the mail ever since, intercepting the postman when possible, and have so far succeeded in keeping them from her; but sooner or later one will get by me and then there will be the devil to pay."

Cheney was interested; the young man was so earnest in his manner, and Judge Treat had sent him.

"You say these letters began coming about two months ago?"

"Yes, sir, and they've come about ten days apart ever since."

"Your friends always receive theirs at the same time?"

"Yes, sir."

"You say they refer to your past? Is there anything in that past you would not want known? Anything which might be considered—er—disgraceful? You will pardon my questions, Mr. Stanton," said Cheney, noting the man's rising choler. "I do not mean to be personal or inquisitive, but it is essential that I know all. I want to help you; now help me do it."

Stanton had risen, but again seated himself and replied:

"Well, colonel, I am no better and no worse than most young men. I was educated at Yale college; my father gave me a liberal allowance and I sowed a fair crop of wild oats, but there was nothing disgraceful, there was no entanglements. After I left college I came here, went in business with father. Last year, as I said, I was married. That's all."

"You know of no one who would have any motive in injuring you?"

"No, sir; not a living soul."

"Have you any of the letters with you?"

"Only two; the rest I destroyed," replied Stanton, handing over the letters. Cheney placed them in a desk drawer and said:

"Do you keep a butler, Mr. Stanton?"

"I did keep one, but he left yesterday and I haven't as yet secured another one."

"That is indeed fortunate. I'll send you a young man to-day. Hire him, trust him implicitly, and go about your business as if nothing had happened. Your butler will look after the mail coming to your house, and be assured no undesirable letter will reach Mrs. Stanton. The case does not look easy, but I think perhaps I can help you. One thing: Not a word of this to anyone, and as soon as your friends give you any more letters bring them to me. Good morning, Mr. Stanton."

As soon as Stanton had gone Cheney sent for Sid Guthrie and explained the case to him.

"Where do I come in, Cheney?" asked Guthrie when he had finished.

"You're Stanton's new butler. You go out there and keep a watch on the incoming mail. Keep Mrs. Stanton from getting undesirable letters. Any that are addressed as these are give to Stanton and let me know it as soon as possible. You're great on hunches—remember the one you had in Smedberg, Neb., when we were on that 'paymaster case'? Get some more on this mail business. You sabe?"

"Sure thing; I'm on all right. But this butler business does not appeal to me. If I spill hot soup down Stanton's back or wine on his wife's dress don't you blame me," and with a laugh he was gone, taking with him a card of introduction to Stanton.

Cheney studied the two letters carefully. He recognized the paper from which the words were cut as the Globe-Democrat from the print, and they were both sent from a substation out on Washington avenue. There was nothing obscene in their contents, but they breathed vengeance and covertly intimated that the writer, or more properly "paster," was after Stanton with a sharp stick. Handwriting or typewriting might have given a clew, but the paper pasted letter did not. Ordinary scratch paper had been used and the envelope was plain white. There was not even a water mark.

"Puzzling, mused Cheney, "and damned ingeniously done, but the person doing it must have had lots of time. To cut a paper and paste six of these letters in one day was not a small job." Cheney determined to wait for developments and at the same time find out what he could about Stanton.

Guthrie was duly installed as butler in the Stanton home and made daily reports to Cheney. Nothing untoward happened. Mr. and Mrs. Stanton were apparently very happy: Stanton was all devotion to his wife and she to him. She was nervous and high strung to a degree and her condition was such that any undue excitement might kill her. Cheney's investigation of Stanton was not prolific of any information and Col. Jack was nonplussed.

About ten days later he received word from Guthrie. Another pasted letter threatening in character had arrived. Simultaneously with this news came Stanton and in his hand he held seven letters, one that had come to his house and six that he had secured from his friends. Stanton was worked up to a high degree of excitement.

"Here's a bunch of them, Col. Cheney. My God! isn't there some way of stopping this avalanche of threats?"

"Leave them here," said Cheney, quietly, "and come here on your way home from your office this evening. Then I may know something."

Cheney now had nine letters, all similar, all threatening. A threat is never made except for a reason—blackmail or revenge. There was nothing to warrant a belief in blackmail because there was no request for money. Who, who could want revenge on Stanton, and for what?

Stanton came back about four o'clock. Cheney had a long talk with him and during the conversation drew from him the fact that prior to his marriage to Mrs. Stanton he had been engaged to a young lady living in Sedalia.

"This lady's name was what?" asked Cheney.

"Grace Ellerton."

"Um, yes. And was she much in love with you, Mr. Stanton?"

"Well, now, Col. Cheney, that—er—is a leading question. Yes, I suppose she was. But I wasn't with her, and we quarreled and separated."

"Yes, you separated, to be sure. How long were you engaged to the young lady, you say?"

"About one year."

"And what became of her?"

"Why, she married an attorney of this city, Abney by name, and Mrs. Stanton and I have met them occasionally in society. In fact Mrs. Abney and I have laughed over our engagement more than once."

"Where does Mrs. Abney live?"

"Out on Washington boulevard. But look here, colonel, good God! you don't think Grace Abney would do such a thing? Impossible, man, impossible!" exclaimed Stanton, rising.

"Mr. Stanton," slowly replied Cheney, "I never think out loud, it hurts. I am merely asking questions to find a clew. Perhaps I have found one. You will receive one more letter, so will your friends, then they will stop and you can discharge your butler."

"All right," said Stanton, "but don't, for God's sake, make a mistake."

"Your impetuous chivalry is running away with your judgment. There will be no mistake made, be assured of that. Good evening, Mr. Stanton."

Stanton left with a cloud of uncertainty in his mind. However, Judge Treat had told him to trust Cheney and he would. But Grace Abney the culprit? No, never!

As soon as Stanton had gone Cheney lighted a fresh cigar and, smilingly, murmured: "Hell hath no fury like that of a woman scorned."

The next morning Cheney made a quiet investigation in the neighborhood of the Abney home. He found that Mrs. Abney about two months ago had purchased a couple of writing pads and some plain envelopes at a small stationery store just around the corner. At the substation he interviewed the man that sold stamps. He was a civil war veteran, Johnson by name, and after Cheney presented his credentials was willing to answer any questions.

"Do you know Mrs. Abney?" asked Cheney.

"Yes, I know her by sight," replied Johnson.

"Does she ever buy stamps here?"

"Yes, that's the way I know her."

"How long since she bought any?"

"About two weeks ago."

"How many stamps does she buy at a time?"

"Generally about 50, half a sheet."

"Now listen," said Cheney, sharply. "This afternoon I'll send you out a sheet of stamps. Put them away in some safe place and when Mrs. Abney buys any more stamps sell her from that sheet and send the rest to me immediately. Don't forget; it is important."

"All right, sir. I won't forget," said Johnson.

Cheney was absolutely certain Mrs. Abney was the letter "paster." In his own mind he knew it, but he wanted the proof, proof that could be used in a court of law if necessary. He went to the post office, interviewed the postmaster, secured a sheet of stamps and that afternoon sent them all to Johnson's substation. Then he waited, waited like an angler watching a bobbing cork, waited for a nibble which would tell him the fish was playing with the bait. Seven days later it happened. Johnson came down with half a sheet of stamps and reported Mrs. Abney had purchased 50 that morning. The cork was bobbing rather vigorously and the indications were the fish would soon swallow hook, line and sinker.

Two days later Stanton came in. A report from Guthrie had preceded his coming.

"Here's another batch of those damned letters," he said, throwing them on the table.

"Right on time to the minute," said Cheney, smiling. "But, Mr. Stanton, let me assure you there won't be any more. These will be the last."

"You mean you know who is sending them and can stop it?" asked Stanton.

"Yes, that's just what I mean, and to-morrow or next day you can discharge your butler; I may need him here."

"All right," said Stanton, "but I'd like to keep him. He's a good one."

"I know that," replied Cheney. "Guthrie is good at anything he undertakes, but I don't believe he fancies this 'butlering' business. Come around to-morrow afternoon and I will tell you all."

Now Cheney was ready to move swiftly and surely in his work. He was sure before that Grace Abney had sent the threatening letters; now he knew it. All that was left to do was to bring about the denouement.

Just off of Cheney's office was an alcove room before the door of which hung a curtain. In this alcove was his secretary's office, and his secretary was a very bright woman named May Wood. Cheney called her.

"Miss Wood, to-morrow morning I want you to be in your office constantly. I expect a lady visitor, quite a society woman in fact, and I want every word spoken while she is here 'taken down.'"

Cheney again interviewed the postmaster and that gentleman promised to have Mrs. Abney in his (Cheney's) office the next morning. He knew her and would not have any trouble in inducing her to come. Cheney didn't want her husband to come—not just yet, if at all. It depended on the woman.

The next morning about 11 o'clock the postmaster and Mrs. Abney arrived. She was a beautiful woman, stylishly gowned, and possessed a pair of blue-black eyes. The introduction was brief and the postmaster withdrew. Mrs. Abney had herself under splendid control. She knew nothing of what was in store for her. Cheney, too, was good to look upon that morning; he was well dressed and decorated with a red carnation.

"Mrs. Abney," he began after his guest was comfortably seated in an easy chair, "I am connected with the government service, and in process of my work I have formed an idea that something is wrong with the stamp department of the St. Louis post office."

"And what has that to do with me, pray?" asked Mrs. Abney in a rich contralto voice. Her eyes were looking straight at Col. Cheney.

"Wait, please. It is thought there are a number of spurious stamps being sold in St. Louis. The sub station near your residence is suspected of being implicated."

"What? Mr. Johnson? Impossible, Col. Cheney, impossible."

"Mrs. Abney, nothing is impossible. I have not said Mr. Johnson was implicated. I am merely investigating. Of course Mr. Abney buys all his stamps downtown; but you, I presume, purchase stamps for your correspondence at the sub station near where you live."

Cheney spoke in a well modulated voice. His manner was that of a gentleman, his eyes were quiet, there was not the least sign of an ulterior motive in this talk. The hook was baited and dangling near the fish, and the fish nibbled.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Abney, "I buy stamps frequently from Mr. Johnson."

"Just so. And when did you last buy any from him?"

"Why, let me see—three days ago, if I remember aright."

Her memory was good; that was the day Johnson reported the sale and returned the remaining half sheet. Not a muscle of Cheney's face moved; the smile was still there.

"Have you used all you bought on that day, Mrs. Cheney?"

"Why, no. I have some of them here now. Here they are," she said, laying some 35 stamps on the table. Col. Cheney carelessly took them. The fish had swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker. All that remained was to land the prize.

Mrs. Abney began to wonder what all this questioning from this quiet, masterful man meant. A slightly uncomfortable feeling began stealing over her. Miss Wood was seated in the curtained alcove, taking down every word.

"I have told you all I know, Col. Cheney. Now I beg you to excuse me; I have an appointment and must go."

The fish was running out with the line; it must be brought back.

"Wait. Just a moment, please," said the colonel. "You know Mr. Fred Stanton, do you not?"

Mrs. Abney's heart began beating faster. The color faded from her face.

"Yes, I know him; what of it?"

"You were engaged to him, were you not?"

"Col. Cheney, your remarks are becoming personal and, to say the least, impertient. I did not come here to be insulted. You have no right to talk to me like that. I shall tell Mr. Abney and he can settle with you." She turned to leave, but Col. Cheney, who had risen again, said: "Wait!" and this time there was no mistaking the tone; it was a command.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Abney, but I do not think you will tell Mr. Abney anything about it. You were in love with Fred Stanton, and you are yet. He married another woman and you determined to get even with him. You couldn't attack him, you couldn't find a weak spot in his armor; but you knew his wife, you knew her condition. You would strike him through her. Then you used the most damnable of weapons, the anonymous letter. You sent them to Mrs. Stanton, you sent them to his friends. Just one falling in Mrs. Stanton's hand and your revenge would have been complete. You wouldn't write the letters, you cut words out of the newspaper and pasted them on a sheet. Similarly you prepared the addresses. You bought the paper at the stationery store near your house, the stamps from Johnson, and while your husband was at his office you did your despicable work. Do you deny this?" Col. Cheney ended by laying nine letters on the table.

When Cheney first began to talk Mrs. Abney stopped, looked at him half over her shoulder, and as his accusations were hurled forth at her, she fully turned. Her color left her and her eyes moved restlessly from side to side. But she was a quick-witted woman and when he had finished she had partly regained her composure.

"A likely story, Col. Cheney, a very likely story, indeed, you have concocted. Clever detective work." She was sneering. "You have found out I bought paper and envelopes, that I bought stamps. So might any number of people have done the same. But you detectives have to accuse some one, so you accuse me. You got me in your office alone, under false pretenses. There are no witnesses to this interview, and my word will go as far as yours. You brute! And you call yourself a gentleman."

"I expected all this, Mrs. Cheney, and I admire you for the fight you are making. You accuse me of having you in my office alone." Three steps took Cheney to the alcove. He threw back the curtain. There sat demure little Miss Wood, her bright eyes sparkling with the intensity of the scene.

"You see,' continued the colonel, "we are not alone."

Mrs. Abney had not yet given up the fight—the fish was still unlanded, but the hand net was ready.

"But I tell you I did not send those letters. You can't prove it," she said.

"Three days ago you bought 50 stamps from Johnson; 35 of them are on the table. You gave them to me. The remainder of the sheet is in this drawer. Here they are," he said, producing the half sheet Johnson had sent him. "Every one of those stamps is marked with indelible ink. I marked them. On every other stamp I wrote your name, 'Grace Abney,' and on the others I marked my name, 'John V. Cheney.' Here are seven of the letters you sent with those stamps on them. Now look."

Mrs. Abney gazed with wide staring eyes as Col. Cheney lighted a small alcohol lamp. He took up one letter and held it so the heat would warm the stamp. Slowly but surely the name "Grace Abney" appeared, coming apparently from nowhere. Then "John V. Cheney," and so on throughout the entire seven letters (the first two letters did not have marked stamps), and then the unused stamps were treated to a similar process, the names coming out with startling distinctness.

For several minutes Mrs. Abney stood irresolute; her composure and self-possession left her; sobs shook her frame as she sank in a chair. The fish was landed and the struggle was over.

"What are you going to do with me?" she sobbed. "Oh, my God, what an exposure! What shall I do, what shall I do?"

"Do?" said Col. Cheney. Now the harshness and tone of command had gone from his voice; the keen, alert detective was gone; he was Cheney, the man and gentleman.

"Do? Why, you are going home, and be true to the good man whose name you bear. From this day forth you're going to be his wife in word, thought, act and deed; you're going to 'rise and sin no more.'" Gently he took her hand and led her to the door.

Cowed, beaten and broken, the erring woman suffered herself to be led.

"Yes—but," she faltered, "your secretary. She heard, she knows."

"That's true, Mrs. Abney, she did hear, she does know, but Miss Wood is discretion itself. She hears everything, sees everything, and knows nothing. Good morning." And the door closed. The poor little fish was once more swimming in untroubled waters, sadder but wiser.

"Well," said Stanton at four o'clock that afternoon, as he burst in upon Cheney, "did you find the sender of those letters?"

"Yes," tersely replied Cheney, "I found the sender and you will be troubled no more."

"Thank God!" the young man muttered. "Who was it, and what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, Stanton," drawled Cheney, "I'm not going to do anything about it. It's stopped, that's all you want."

"Was it Grace Abney?" slowly asked Stanton.

"No, it wasn't Grace Abney," replied Cheney.

"Well, you beat me, colonel. But I suppose you know what you're doing. Now nothing remains but a settlement. What's the fee?" he asked reaching for his check book.

"That's so," said Cheney, smiling. "I forgot the fee. The fee will be your promise to say nothing more about this case. You will also extract the same promise from your friends who received these letters. That's all, Stanton, the case is closed. Remember me to Judge Treat when next you see him. And don't forget to get a new butler. Good evening." They shook hands and Stanton went out the door.

At 5:30 Miss Wood had gone and Cheney was alone. He opened the desk drawer, took therefrom the telltale letters and stamps and Miss Wood's stenographic notes with transcribed report. He threw them all in the grate, touched a lighted match to them and, as the flames mounted higher and higher, destroying every evidence of the woman's folly, he murmured:

"Well, anyway, I had my fingers crossed when I told Stanton it wasn't Grace Abney." His conscience was easy, and when nothing remained but ashes he put on his hat and went to dinner.

TOO MUCH FOR THE BOY.

Youngster Wanted the Pony, But There Was a Limit.

The Episcopalian bishop of a New England diocese was about to make his annual visitation to the parish of a country rector. In the latter's family was an obstreperous boy, whom the father thought to bribe into good behavior while the bishop was the guest at the rectory.

So the anxious parent told the small boy if he would behave well while the bishop was there, the following spring the father would buy the boy a pony and cart. The boy promised.

Surprised the Bishop.

The bishop arrived, dinner time came, and the first course was oysters. The bishop said his doctor had told him never to eat oysters for fear of getting typhoid fever.

The second course was soup, but the bishop made answer: "This is most unfortunate, but my doctor has told me never to eat liquid food."

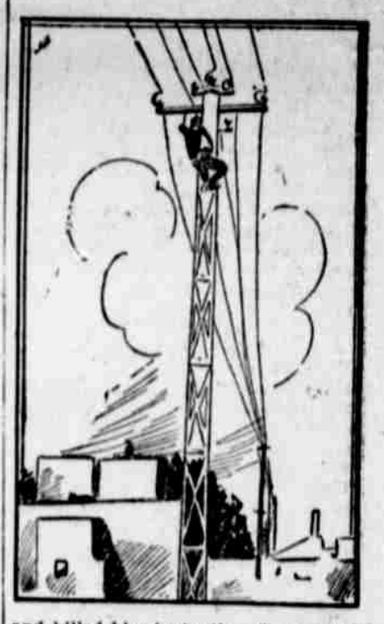
The third course was salmon. The bishop again refused, as his doctor had forbidden him to eat fish on account of ptomaine poisoning.

The boy could stand it no longer, and cried as he looked at the bishop: "Give the old guy an egg; you can keep your old pony and cart!"

AUTOMATIC JUSTICE IN ITALY.

Robber Meets Death While Trying to Steal Copper Wire.

A few days ago a robber tried to steal copper by cutting down the wires from an iron pole outside of Naples. The wires were carrying a high tension current of 5,000 volts,



and killed him instantly. It was with difficulty that the body was brought down, as one arm was firmly gripped around the column. The current passing through the arm had partly melted the iron of the column.

RARE SKELETON IS FOUND.

Bones of the Loxolophodon Secured from Southern Wyoming.

There arrived in New York last week for the Museum of Natural History the skeleton of a loxolophodon. It was unearthed in southern Wyoming, where the great beast roamed in large numbers many centuries ago, by an expedition sent out from the museum by Prof. H. F. Osborn and headed by Prof. Walter Granger. Speaking of the success attending the search, Prof. Granger said:

"We found the skeleton of the largest mammal living at the time and for which we made careful search. This huge mammal was known as the loxolophodon, a mixture of elephant and rhinoceros. It had six horns—two enormous ones in the back of the skull, two smaller ones over the eyes and two rudimentary horns on the tip of the nose.

"We obtained an interesting lot of the skeletons of the titanotheres, a smaller animal than the last; numerous specimens of the carvora, including the largest of the time, the mesonyx; many rodents, or squirrel-like mammals; some of the earliest camel-like, even toed, hoofed mammals; an achenedon, one of the very large, even toed animals, with piglike teeth and feet and an early primate like the lemurs, notharetus. In all we obtained 100 species in the Washakie basin, 100 in the Bridges basin and 40 in the Wabsatch basin."